Of the four Gospel accounts of the resurrection, Matthew’s is the most dramatic. The two Marys don’t just arrive to find the stone moved and the tomb empty, there is an earthquake and a shining angel rolls away the stone to reveal to them the empty tomb. There is no ‘Lazarus moment’ with Jesus stepping from the tomb. No, Matthew reveals a divine intervention. The resurrection had taken place inside a sealed tomb. The physicality of the executed Jesus transformed to the spiritual out of sight.

The angel instructs the two women to go and tell the disciples that their Lord is risen and to go to Galilee where He will meet with them.

The women are terrified by the experience but also filled with joy because what they had been promised by Jesus was coming to fruition. But, despite the angelic commission there follows a strange turn of events. Jesus steps into their path. The two Marys take hold of His feet. This gives emphasis to Jesus’ physical reincarnation. He has not just risen in spirit, but has risen in the flesh, death itself conquered.

Now the two women are not just the bearers of anecdotal news, they are fully and completely witnesses, bearing first-hand news of this cosmic event, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine the joy? After all the darkness of those previous sad days when they had watched as Jesus, in whom they had placed all their hope and who they loved so much, was slowly executed and then watching as his body was sealed into a tomb. And even after that, they had, through their desperate sadness, fear and sense of loss, remained faithful and present, unlike the majority of Jesus’ followers. It is now their task, as commanded by Jesus, to go to them, to the places where they have fled, and tell them what they have seen and to gather in Galilee.

Jesus’ command to these two women, who were His first apostles, is a command to all of us, to be witnesses and to tell and keep telling the good news. Yet, even as we celebrate the joy of the Easter rising of our Saviour, we find ourselves in a strange place, perhaps touched with sadness and fear. We certainly feel the loss of our churches, temporary as it may be, and the fellowship we find when we gather in them.

We may not be able to actually touch the feet of Jesus, but we are certainly witness to His presence amongst us. We are witnessing the Christlikeness of so many people; All the doctors and nurses who are trying to save lives and provide care and treatment for those who are desperately ill and putting themselves at risk to do so. Those who are working so hard to ensure we all have food on our tables. The teachers, pharmasists and shop workers who continue to ensure our lives can be as disrupted as little as possible. Those who provide care for the most vulnerable in our communities, even staying apart from their own loved ones to do so. Even those who are willing to volunteer, even if only to be a reassuring voice on the phone.

Eventually we will all gather again in our own Galilee, ‘The Place of the Gentiles’, and we will be able to tell the stories of when, where and how we saw Jesus at work, and with joy we will be able to thank Him and worship Him together remembering those last words of Mathew’s Gospel, ‘And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age’.

Alleluia, Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.

Amen